

The Techbuilt Houses of Garrett Park



(Photo: 10805 Clermont Avenue by Vickie Baily, 2010)

Designed by Boston architect Carl Koch in 1953, Techbuilt houses were pre-fabricated dwellings with a flexible floor plan developed to meet the tremendous demand for housing that existed after the end of World War II. They came in a number of versions, were delivered by truck, and could be set up and roofed in two to four days. Techbuilt houses used mass-production techniques to reduce costs, but their modular design allowed for flexibility and individualization. Utilities, bath, stairs and fireplace were in a central immovable core. The weight of the house was borne by interior posts and beams and the exterior walls. Interior partitions could, therefore, be readily moved or eliminated in response to the needs of growing families. Exterior walls were composed of pre-fabricated panels created in 4-foot wide modules. Even the windows fit this module so they could be placed where needed. The houses were decidedly modern in appearance with metal-framed windows tucked high beneath the broad overhangs of the low gable roof. Some houses had colorful panels between windows; others had a variety of rustic sidings. An entire wall of windows on one gable end illuminated and enlarged the living areas thereby “bringing in the whole outdoors” a concept that would have had special appeal in verdant Garrett Park. Vaulted ceilings which followed the roof pitch added to the sense of spaciousness. Koch described his house as being composed of only an attic and a basement. If the lot permitted it, the lower floor was often partially below grade. The entrance could be on the side or in the gable end, again allowing for flexibility of placement on the lot. With their split level plans, the houses had the long, low silhouette of a one story house but all the advantages of the modern two level house.

Koch described his houses on the young medium of television in 1954, and the eager response of would-be home-owners virtually overwhelmed the fledgling company. The first Techbuilt house in Garrett Park was built by the Modine family in 1956 at 10711 Kenilworth. (It has been demolished.) At about the same time a group of young government

employees was contacting the Techbuilt firm. They were brimming with plans to find land and erect a Techbuilt community where they could live and raise families together. Because of the backlog caused by the tremendous interest in the house, the company could not accommodate them and, of that group, only the Howes (10808 Clermont) and the Gootenbergs (10805 Clermont) eventually built in Garrett Park. The Howes built their home in 1957 from plans they developed so that it would look like a Techbuilt house. The Gootenbergs eventually got their authentic Techbuilt home in 1960, but they had to supply some of their own materials and contractor. Robert Kirsch, the contractor for the Gootenbergs also erected the Techbuilt at 10809 Clermont at the same time. He then went on to subdivide the lots of Shelley Court, and from 1962 through 1964, he built there a number of houses which resemble those by Techbuilt, but have no official connection with the company. In 1963, a Techbuilt house went up at 4403 Cambria and two more were built in the 70s at 4709 Waverly and a one-story version at 11106 Kenilworth. (Now also demolished.) Margaret Leaf, wife of the children's book author Monroe Leaf (11121 Rokeby), was the local representative of the Techbuilt firm at the time.

The Garrett Park Archives contains copies of original advertising brochures, plans, and manuals for Techbuilt houses. Carl Koch and Andy Lewis, *At Home with Tomorrow*. New York, Rinehart & Company, 1958.